

# ***THE BOBWHITE BULLETIN***

***An Update on Virginia's Quail Recovery Initiative***

***Summer 2011***

A COOPERATIVE EFFORT:





## **INTRODUCTION**

*The Bobwhite Bulletin* is your electronic update on the status of Virginia's Quail Recovery Initiative (QRI), a cooperative effort between several agencies, groups, and individuals to restore early successional habitat and the Northern Bobwhite quail population. This newsletter will highlight selected projects from Private Lands Wildlife Biologists (PLWBs) and the thoughts of our QRI Team Leaders. Over the past year we've made a lot of progress in Virginia and we hope the best is yet to come. Quail projects, large and small, continue throughout the Commonwealth as we piece together "quail quilts" of habitat in order to help the species recover. We're excited that three new PLWBs have joined the Quail Team, replacing three departing biologists who made a lasting impact on Virginia's quail restoration effort. Moving forward, we look forward to your phone calls and emails as you search for answers on how to provide quality wildlife habitat on your property. Contact info for the PLWB in your region is located on the last page of this newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you!



*Credit: Allen Boynton*

## **NEWS FROM THE FIELD**

### **David Bryan: PLWB - Northeast VA Field Office**



It is hard to believe that I've been with the Quail Team for over five months now, stepping into Mike Budd's hugely successful work throughout the region! From the Middle Peninsula to the Culpeper Basin, the potential for early successional habitat development is seemingly limitless and success is just a matter of stirring up and sustaining interest. Whether a landowner has a 100 acre farm or an 8 acre backyard, there are always options for improving wildlife value on a property. Field borders, shrub plantings, pine thinning, and fescue conversion are just a few of the practices that we frequently recommend.

During early May I was contacted by a landowner in Mathews County. Mrs. Grimstead had signed up for the Quail Management Assistance Program (QMAP), received a package of information from Marc Puckett, and was already managing for wildlife on her land. She had eagerly investigated the packet and was even more excited when I gave her a call to discuss a potential field visit to her property. The timing was impeccable too – she'd just flushed her first quail covey in 15 years that very morning! In June I was able to visit her property with District Conservationist Mike Combs and together we were able to give technical assistance in regards to her development of brooding and nesting habitat.

While Mrs. Grimstead's habitat work is commendable, she knows that her small property will not sustain a covey by itself. Her management efforts may certainly help the species, but I feel that Mrs. Grimstead's outreach efforts are even more praiseworthy as she is currently encouraging other landowners to develop a "quail quilt". She has written a local newspaper article (included here in the *Bulletin*), has been playing our "Answering the Call" DVD at a local farmer's market where she regularly sells plants, and otherwise stirs up interest. Ultimately, government agencies can only do so much and landowners like Mrs. Grimstead play a critical role in the restoration of Northern Bobwhite quail populations, both in terms of habitat work and outreach – so thank you!

Though I've just barely gotten my boots wet, I am thrilled to be a new member of the Quail Team and this early experience, amongst others, have me excited about the work to come. We hope it goes a long way for wildlife!





## **Bob Glennon: PLWB - Southeast VA Field Office**



I'm one of the new kids on the block and am starting my second career after a thirty-year stint with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a conservation plant specialist, ecologist, wetland scientist, and planner in twenty states.

I've lived just across the state line in northeastern North Carolina for eleven years and have watched the evolution of habitats as they've been managed with prescribed

burning, mowing, seeding, and idling. It is truly amazing to see what happens and how wildlife reacts to that evolution. The landowner interest and accomplishments in southeastern Virginia are as just as impressive. I've already seen pine plantation thinned by landowners for wildlife habitat on their own and the diverse stand of native grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs that have emerged in the understory of those forests. In time, I'm sure that wildlife will fully utilize that habitat as the owners continue to manage it and maintain its vigor.

A set of fields in the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Idle Land best management practice had great germination of chickweed and should be feeding dozens of doves soon. The pine trees that line the fields will provide ideal dove nesting sites and old hedgerows between fields will house rabbits and quail once they are renovated and managed to maintain their low woody cover. Seeded filter strips established under Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program on the same farm are already good nesting cover.

The potential for developing good habitat is limitless. Management of existing stands of native grasses and wildflowers, maintenance of hedgerows, thinning pine plantations, allowing land to go idle, disking narrow contour strips of brood habitat in the spring, and seeding and planting are all tools in our habitat development toolbox.



## Galon Hall: Team Leader - NRCS Richmond Office



In the last 12 months our team has done an excellent job at working with private landowners across Virginia to establish wildlife habitat. They have spent over \$650,000 of Federal Farm Bill program dollars on many different quality projects. We have embarked on some new efforts working with Longleaf Pine plantings in Southeast Virginia and Golden-Winged Warbler habitat in Western Virginia. We have been able to secure longer term funding from NRCS to support the positions through 2013 and 2014 which would not have been possible without the incredible work put in by our staff of wildlife professionals. I continue to be

amazed at the breadth of knowledge our team possesses and I don't think there is anything we could ask that would not get done. We are very fortunate to have excellent people in the right places pushing this Virginia Quail Initiative forward. I encourage you to take a minute and evaluate the opportunities on your land, then give a member of our team a call and see if we can help you develop a "quail quilt" in your area.

## Jay Howell: Team Leader – DGIF Richmond Office



Well, another spring season has come and gone. After the rough year that quail had in 2010, things are looking up in many parts of the state. Although the final results of our spring surveys haven't been fully analyzed yet, a cursory analysis of the data seems to indicate positive gains on many of our spring calling routes. We heard quail this year on some routes where they had been absent for several years prior. For example, in the Culpeper Quail Priority Area I heard quail at several stops where last year there was only silence. Finally, in Lee County in southwest Virginia, the use of fire to control an invasive species may have had an accidental positive effect for quail! Despite years of little to no detections in the area, suddenly this year we're hearing them in large numbers there. I

think this shows the remarkable resilience of the Northern Bobwhite. They can lurk on the edges just waiting for the right habitat conditions to explode into. "If you build it, they will come" isn't just for cornfields in Iowa! Every acre of habitat we reclaim for quail gets that fly wheel spinning faster and faster. All it takes is perseverance and patience.



## **Katie Martin: PLWB - Southcentral VA Field Office**



When working with private landowners you learn pretty quickly that their goals and objectives can vary immensely when it comes to quail management. Everyone has their own “yard stick” for measuring the success of the habitat improvements they are implementing. Some folks will measure success by the numbers of quail. Are there more quail? How many more? And WHERE ARE THEY? But those types of answers are hard to come by when you’re dealing with a critter that doesn’t exactly stand up to be counted when the census taker comes knocking. For most folks though it’s really not about the numbers, but looking at the broader picture that they define success by.

For a couple boyhood friends from Nottoway a good day of fellowship in the field is all it takes to call it a successful day. Most of these fellas cut their teeth bird hunting. The sight of a dog on point and the explosion of a covey rise underfoot will make them as giddy as a schoolgirl. But over time as habitat decreased and bird numbers fell they began to pursue other avenues to experience that same enjoyment. They soon found that rabbit hunting fills that niche pretty well. Now this isn’t to say they won’t chase a few partridges here and there. They continue to pursue ol’ bobwhite (while also implementing habitat improvements on their farm lands), but rabbit hunting is what brings them together nearly every Saturday of the season. After the mandatory biscuit and coffee stop, they head out to try and kick up a few cottontails. On this crisp January morning they were hunting a local farm that is actively managed for wildlife and timber. Previously a dairy farm, the pastures are now filled with 3 year old loblolly pines interspersed with 35ft to 50ft wide strips of native warm season grass. The edges are full of blackberry brambles and shrub thickets, while a half acre chestnut grove with an understory of clover sits near the center. It didn’t take long with this mix of habitat for the dogs to hit a couple hot tracks. Within a few hours 8 rabbits were in the bag, although I’m pretty sure more than 8 shells had been spent. Although we didn’t flush any quail on this morning, several coveys had been heard earlier in the season.



In the end, these guys like so many landowners we work with measure the success of habitat improvements not strictly by the numbers but by the enjoyment they get fellowshiping with good friends in the outdoors and by the many wildlife species that benefit from their hard work.

## **Marc Puckett: Team Leader - Farmville DGIF Field Office**



### **Salute to our Private Lands Wildlife Biologists:**

Our five private lands wildlife biologists (David Bryan, Bob Glennon, Katie Martin, Andy Rosenberger and Debbie Wright) are the true force behind our Quail Recovery Initiative – the “unsung heroes” without which implementing the QRI would be ineffective.

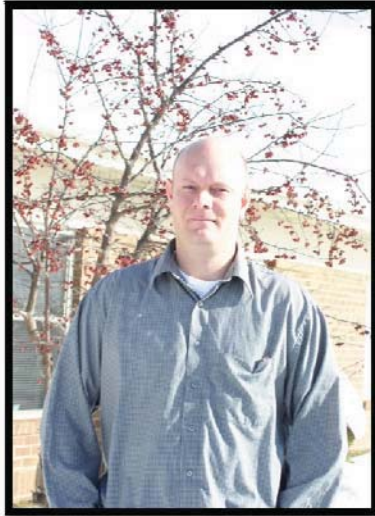
The table below summarizes PLWB activities for fiscal years 2010 and 2011. The number of site visits alone shows how much effort these biologists are putting into the QRI (*Note: In FY 2010 the PLWBs were only on staff for 6 months*). This does not show the hundreds of threatened and endangered species reviews, comments and assistance on other USDA projects provided by the PLWBs.

Science is crucial to all management, but the science has to be applied, and its application is not always glamorous. Being a private lands biologist involves many rewarding days in the field with landowners, but few actually working with the critters. And for every day in the field, there may be one in the office writing management plans or completing the paperwork necessary to enroll landowners in conservation programs. I was in the infantry when in service. Those in the infantry are known as “grunts” – the term needs no explanation. All the work is important, but someone has to do the grunt work. There was a pride among grunts as among no others (in my humble opinion). “Grunts, they’re the best I’ve ever seen Grandma. They come from all over, places where no one cares about them or has never heard of them. But they can take it. A grunt can take anything”, Charlie Sheen’s character Chris Taylor in “Platoon” – Best Picture 1986. Our private lands wildlife biologists represent the “grunts” of the quail world, without which no amount of outreach or research will ever “bring back Bob.”

### **PLWB Activity Summary by Fiscal Year (June 30 to July 1).**

<b>Fiscal year</b>	<b>Site Visits</b>	<b>New Contacts</b>	<b>Management plans</b>	<b>Outreach Sessions</b>	<b>New Habitat acres</b>	<b>Total Farm acres</b>
2010	251	235	104	47	1168	21,080
2011	540	406	270	160	5,354	81,972
Total	791	641	374	207	6,522	103,052

## **Andy Rosenberger: PLWB - Southwest VA Field Office**



Last July I got a call from a landowner in Wythe County who told me that he might be interested in the Virginia Quail Best Management Practices (BMP) Program and wondered if I could come out and take a look at his farm. Before going out to Mr. Kidd's farm I pulled up some aerial photography to get an idea of what we would be looking at. My first impression based solely on the aerial photo was that Mr. Kidd was probably very similar to most of the other farm owners that I have worked with. I assumed that if Mr. Kidd was interested in helping quail we might devise a plan for a few acres of suitable quail habitat that would add to the "quail quilt" habitat concept that we have been promoting to landowners. That first impression could not have been further from the truth!

What first started off as a visit where I was expecting to enroll a couple of acres quickly turned into a larger project that took a holistic approach to integrating wildlife and a grazing operation. Prior to a few years ago, Mr. Kidd's did not live on the property as he was active in a professional career outside of farming, and thus the farm was not his primary focus. For a reason that I do not know Mr. Kidd decided to focus more of his attention on the family farm and began wondering how he could manage it while also providing quality habitat for wildlife. In order to reach this goal Mr. Kidd contacted me and the local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff. Presently Mr. Kidd is extremely busy in making improvements to his farm while also juggling his professional career. The time, interest and work that he has put into his property is a true testament of his focus and drive towards reaching his goal of a property that will allow him to marry both agricultural practices and wildlife management.

Currently Mr. Kidd is in the process of creating nearly 80 acres of habitat suitable for quail. Through the assistance of the Quail BMP Program and NRCS Mr. Kidd is now planting native warm season grasses and forbs for grazing, creating cutback borders around his property to create early successional shrub habitat, installing riparian buffer corridors around his streams that incorporate quality quail nesting habitat, and converting fescue stands outside of his fencing system to native warm season grasses. These activities will create quality nesting, brooding, and escape cover for quail and other early successional habitat dependant species while also providing his grazing operation quality forage during the dry summer months. I am using this space in the newsletter not only as way to highlight the work that Mr. Kidd has done and to give him his due accolades but am also using the space as an example of what planning while looking at the whole farm or big picture can do. Due to Mr. Kidd's willingness to work with the resources that were available to him he is now in the process of creating a financially profitable farm that also supports his love of wildlife. I hope that Mr. Kidd's farm can serve as an excellent example and model of what is possible and that more landowners will follow the path he is blazing.



## **Debbie Wright: PLWB - Northwest VA Field Office**



In January of this year, I joined the “Quail Team” when I took over the position vacated by Ken Kesson. I didn’t realize the huge shoes I was trying to fill until I started looking at all the projects that Ken had in the works. Most of these projects were completed this summer, so we are on our way to having a bumper crop of quail habitat in Northwest Virginia, thanks to Ken’s work!

While I’ve been spending a lot of my time visiting with landowners that Ken had worked with and finalizing their projects, I have had a chance to initiate my own too. The very first one was on some private property tucked into woods adjacent to National Forest. The landowner had some clearings that he wanted to convert to quail habitat and, to top it off, he had seen 2 quail chicks during the summer of 2010! The quail are hopefully still there – now all we have to do is improve their habitat!

This landowner not only wants to improve quail habitat, he wants to learn more about their needs. He spent many hours on the computer researching different warm season grass cultivars and forbs. He lined up volunteer labor and equipment to help prepare the sites and plant the warm season grasses and wildflower seeds. And these same volunteers are ready to maintain the habitat, once it’s established. The grasses and forbs have germinated, thanks to several strategically timed rain showers in the Shenandoah Valley, so hopefully I’ll be able to share the news that quail are there again soon!

In my short tenure here, I’ve seen some beautiful areas of Virginia and met some wonderful landowners that want to see and hear quail again. And this is just the beginning! I love this job!



## **OVERALL ACHIEVEMENTS AS A TEAM**

Our quail team has been busy. Collectively, our 5 private lands wildlife biologists have made 791 site visits, written 374 management plans, conducted 207 outreach sessions, created 6,522 new habitat acres, and worked with individuals owning more than 103,052 acres of land. This year they allocated approximately \$240,600.00 in DGIF wildlife BMP money – which included 239 acres of field borders, 277 acres of idle crop lands and 398 acres of fescue conversion to warm season grasses. In addition, 3,023 acres of habitat were created or managed through the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, 42% of which occurred in our quail target counties. We also now have 83 landowners and 94 tracts of land enrolled in the Quail Management Assistance Program. These landowners own 24,188 acres, of which 4,438 is in some form of quail habitat management (18%). Other accomplishments for the year include: DVD “Answering the Call” produced and widely distributed, articles in Smithsonian Magazine and Covey Rise Newsletter, mass mailings to over 6000 landowners, 300 quail management DVDs distributed, Virginia Quail Council meeting held (40 attendees), and presentations on the QRI to the General Assembly Sportsmen’s Caucus.

## **NBTC/NBCI REPORT**

All five PLWBs and two QRI Team Leaders attended the National Bobwhite Technical Committee (NBTC) meeting in Tallahassee, Florida this August. The NBTC is comprised of over 100 wildlife professionals from state and federal agencies, universities, and private organizations which provide leadership and technical guidance for the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI). The heart of the NBTC is the system of subcommittees (Ag Policy, Forestry, Grasslands, Outreach and Research) which provide direction for the NCBI in its strategic effort to restore wild bobwhite quail populations to 1980 levels. The NCBI includes an easily updated plan, a massive Geographic Information Systems-based conservation planning tool, and a small staff team of specialists dedicated to range-wide, policy level efforts to bolster respective state step-down strategies.

In addition to helping out with the subcommittees, the Quail Team attendees enjoyed presentations on quail management, songbird conservation, research, and even a review of the Western Quail Plan. Finally, four of the PLWBs were able to attend a tour of the Tall

Timbers Research Station and a quail plantation close by. This area of the Red Hills has put an astounding amount of time, research, money and effort into quail management and the results are evident. It is encouraging to see how quail will respond if the habitat is provided for them.

For more information on the NBTC and NBCI, please visit: [www.bringbackbobwhites.org](http://www.bringbackbobwhites.org). Also, please visit <http://www.bringbackbobwhites.org/blogs/virginia> to read Team Leader Marc Puckett’s monthly NBCI blog for Virginia.





## **THIS ISSUE'S MANAGEMENT TIPS**

### **"It's Time to Start Thinking About Killing Fescue"**

There is no time like fall to kill fescue. While there are other ways to do it, a fall herbicide application is the best way to start. Why fall? Well, fescue is a cool season grass and it really begins to grow actively with those first few weeks of cooler fall weather. And active plant growth is one key ingredient to getting an effective kill. Most herbicides used to kill fescue are called systemics – meaning they are taken in through the growing plant tissue and disseminated throughout the plants "system." Plants that are sprayed while dormant, such as fescue during a hot, dry summer, or during mid winter, do not take up the herbicides and thus little if any kill results. Usually by mid September and on through October, fescue is in its prime fall growth form. By spraying in fall, before fescue goes dormant for the cold winter, residual herbicide is taken into the plants root system where it continues to "kill" the plant through winter. In addition, by spraying in fall, this allows you to re-examine the field in early spring (late February through March) to see if any spots were missed, or if any stubborn fescue remains. These areas can now be spot treated for a better kill. Spraying in the fall also will allow you to begin planting earlier the next spring.



New information concerning native warm season grass establishment suggests that getting the seed in before the last frost in your area is critical to getting a first year stand. By seeding earlier (March to early April), newly planted grasses and forbs can also get a jump on competitive annual grasses like crabgrass and others. Not to mention they can get a better root system established before Virginia's typical June drought hits. Lastly, a fall fescue treatment can be followed by a spring herbicide treatment using different herbicides that can help control spring and summer competition without harming the native grass and some wildflower seedlings.

The basic method: from mid September through early October, hay, flash graze, or burn off the field of fescue to be sprayed. Allow 8 to 10 inches of new green growth to occur, and then spray with 1.5 to 2 quarts per acre of a glyphosate herbicide (Roundup®, RazorPro®, or other generic). Some suggest using 17 lbs of ammonium sulfate per 100 gallons of tank mix to stimulate fescue growth and increase herbicide effectiveness. At the very least, use a quality herbicide and the proper surfactant to insure a good kill. *(Continued on next page).*

## **THIS ISSUE'S MANAGEMENT TIPS (cont.)**

Inspect the stand in late February through mid March to see if spot treatment is necessary. You can plant your native grass and wildflower mixes from early March through mid April depending on where you live in Virginia. As a general rule the farther east you live the earlier you need to plant to get the seed in before last frost.

You might also consider using an at-planting application of an herbicide containing imazapic (Plateau®, Panoramic® or equivalent). A rate of 4 to 8 ounces per acre is safe for warm season grasses other than switchgrass and for many wildflowers. Read and follow all herbicide label instructions – it is the law, and it just makes sense. Consult a biologist or plant expert for specifics or see our website at: [www.dgif.virginia.gov/quail/nativewarm-seasongrasses.pdf](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/quail/nativewarm-seasongrasses.pdf).



*Want  
Habitat?  
Convert Your  
Fescue to  
Natives*



Adapted from Harper et al., 2007



## QRI IN THE NEWS

The below links and article clippings are from various media outlets that have featured the Quail Recovery Initiative and the NBCI, which Virginia supports:

- “Culpeper part of state plan to restore quail” in Fredericksburg’s *Free Lance Star*:  
<http://www.fredericksburg.com/News/FLS/2011/012011/01032011/594761/>
- “Bringing Back Bobwhite” in Culpeper’s *Star Exponent*  
<http://www2.starexponent.com/news/2011/jan/01/bringing-back-bobwhite-ar-747340/>
- “Restoring Tradition of Quail Hunting” in the *New York Times*  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/sports/restoring-the-tradition-of-quail-hunting.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/sports/restoring-the-tradition-of-quail-hunting.html?_r=1)
- In the *Gloucester-Mathews Gazette Journal*:



Michael Combs, left, Gloucester County extension agent, and David Bryan, right, wildlife biologist with the quail team, visited Nancy Grimstead of Mathews last Wednesday to inspect her quail habitat and share information on food and cover requirements for the birds.

### **Resident hopes to create 'quail quilt' in county**

Nancy Grimstead of Mathews, is turning part of her property into a habitat for the bobwhite quail, and she hopes other property owners will join her in creating a “quail quilt” in the county.

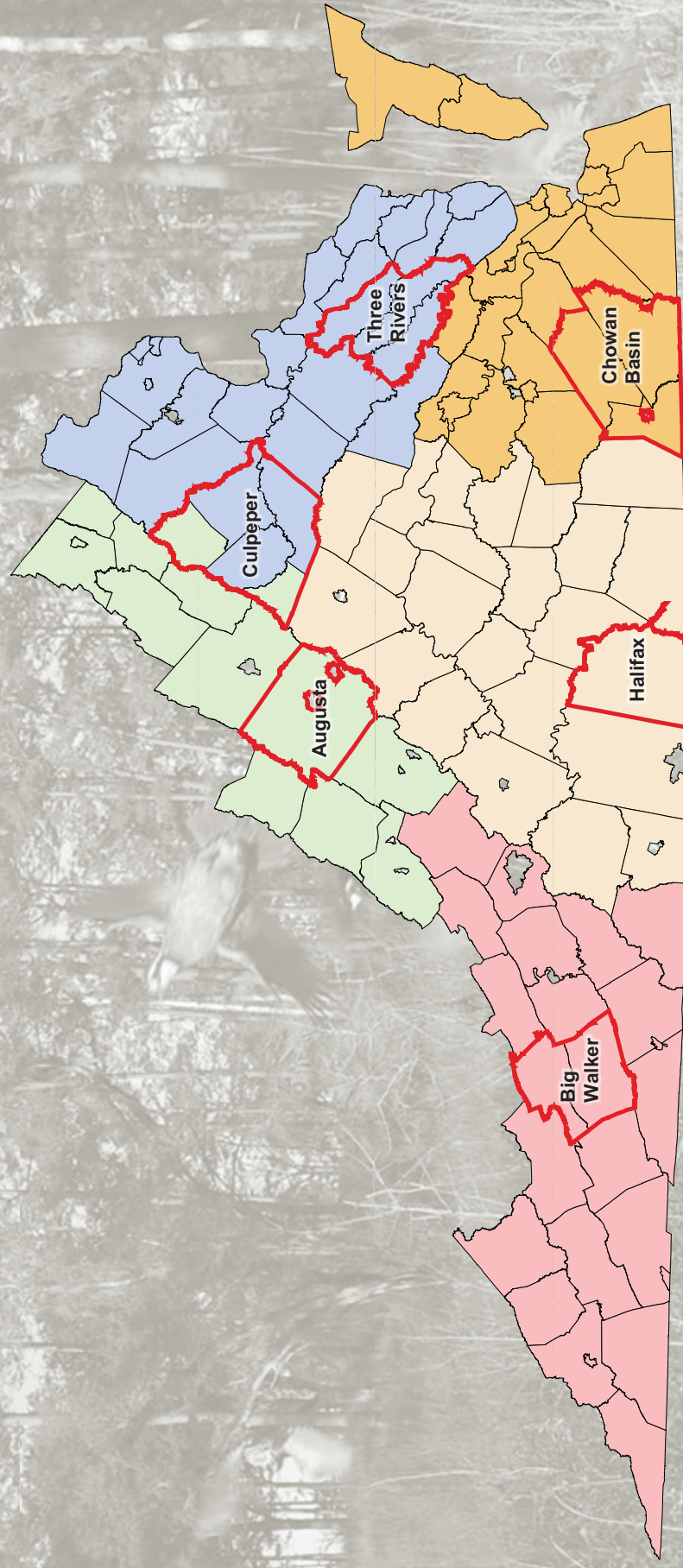
“The bobwhite quail’s numbers have declined recently, said a press release, so the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has created the Quail Management Assistance Program. Under the program, VDGIF helps groups of landowners throughout Virginia create these quail quilts, or pieces of land “sown” together, to increase quail habitat. Land planted for quail habitat also helps numerous other species of wildlife and songbirds, said the release.

Grimstead said quail used to be common on her property, but she hadn’t seen any for 20 years until last summer, when a pair appeared in her back yard. This spring, she began work on a four-acre field that hadn’t been cultivated for crops in 50 years. Using information from the quail program, she planted the field in a wildlife food crop, shrubs, and trees to provide brooding areas and food for the shy birds.

Anyone interested in the program can talk to Grimstead at Mathews Farmers’ Market on Saturdays or visit [www.dgif.virginia.gov/quail](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/quail).

# ANSWERING THE CALL: THE QUAIL RECOVERY INITIATIVE

## Financial Assistance is Available – Join the Quail Recovery Team Today



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